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ABSTRACT

One aspect of teacher behavior in which teachers appear as brokers of policies, changing and modifying their behavior to meet multiple expectations, is reported in this study. Nine elementary school teachers were observed at work in an attempt to relate what they did to the web of educational policy surrounding them. The purpose was to gain a snapshot of their teaching behavior rather than an ethnography of their occupational lives. Field notes were taken on what the teacher did, what students did, the use of resources, and the interaction with the environment. Through interviews with the teachers, explanations were sought for behaviors. The teachers were seen as negotiators in interactions with students and also between the educational policy within which they operated and their classroom practices. The patterning effects of policy were seen in five different areas: (1) lesson content; (2) text use; (3) program structure; (4) resource rationing; and (5) internalization of the organization's mission. Within each area, teachers also engaged in policy negotiation, either explicitly with school administrators or tacitly in the particular way they responded to policy dictates. (JD)

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NEGOTIATING WORK ROLES: TEACHING BEHAVIOR IN THE UNITED STATES

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NEGOTIATING WORK ROLES: TEACHING BEHAVIOR IN THE UNITED STATES

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It is often difficult to measure the effects of organizational or governmental policy on teaching, and, indeed, deliberate efforts at changing the way teachers teach have disappeared without a trace (Kirst, 1983). Standard deficit-model program and personnel evaluations show large gaps between intended policy and implementation. Consequently, these evaluations produce the conclusion that the programs are ill-conceived or that the subject teachers are balky and uncooperative. There is, however, a very different face to this question -- one in which teachers appear as brokers of policies, changing and modifying their behavior to meet multiple expectations. This is the aspect of teacher behavior that shows itself in the research reported here. Teachers appear not so much as recipients and executors of policy as they do as active negotiators of policy. While there is nothing unique in this assertion, the behaviors of nine teachers involved in this

research present a vivid picture of how policy negotiation allows teachers to gain a firm sense of occupational self, a working theory of practice.

A Description of the Research

This study of teachers in the United States is part of a larger, cross-national exploratory study which attempts to trace the linkages between policy and teacher behavior. That project rests on three premises. First, teaching has become the object of reform in many countries, and thus researchers and policy makers in these countries share a concern for understanding the effects of policies. It is also the case, that policy reforms being considered in some countries are already standard practice in other countries. Second, national cultures strongly shape teaching and education limiting the extent of variation within a single country. By coordinating a set of studies which extends across national borders, we seek to see greater variation in teaching work. Third, the categorical comparisons of funding levels, curricula, or staffing levels have not been terribly robust in explaining cross-national differences in performance or organizational behavior (Kerchner & Murphy, 1985). This study, it is hoped, will contribute to the overall goals of the cross-national exploration by showing how teacher behavior

reshapes the meaning of educational policies.

In this study, we adopted an exploratory approach, field-grounded, inductive approach. We observed nine teachers at work and sought to relate what they did to the web of educational policy surrounding them. The nine teachers work in elementary schools in Upland, California and Park City, Utah. Both school districts are in cities with higher than average incomes, although in each school about 10 percent of the students qualify for free lunch programs and Chapter I assistance. Both school districts are reasonably small, under 10,000 students, and thus we expect the internal bureaucracies in the study districts are less complex than those in larger cities. Still, the workplace setting -- the physical and organizational arrangement of classes -- was clearly recognizable as standard American fare.

Each of the classes, second to sixth grades, was observed for a period ranging from 90 minutes to four hours: a total of more than 30 hours of observation. The purpose was to gain a snapshot of their teaching behavior (this rather than an ethnography of their occupational lives). We recorded what the teacher did, what students did, the use of resources, and the interaction with the environment. Then, through interview with the teachers, we sought explanations for behaviors. This report is an analysis of the more than 60 pages of field notes that resulted from the observations and interviews.

The Concept of A Negotiated Order

The concept of a negotiated order flows from the interactionist perspective on social change. Essentially, it holds that the meaning of social structures changes as a function of interaction. The definition of a social role becomes a matter of reciprocity, and a stabilized set of social roles forms what Strauss calls a negotiated order (Strauss, 1978, p. 35). When viewed with this perspective, organizations, their structures, and the web of rules that surrounds each workplace appears fluid, dynamic, and situationally adaptive. Thus, formal rules and organizational structures become creatures of their time, place, and particularly of their heritage.

When applied to the sociology of occupations, the negotiated order perspective has proven useful in explaining how different professionals divide up their duties in the treatment of mental patients (Bucher & Schatzman, 1964), how nurses care for the dying (Glazer & Strauss, 1967), and how unions and management maintain stable relationships in an unstable environment (Kerchner & Mitchell, 1986).

The teacher as negotiator has been seen as an interaction with students "as teachers seek to maximize pupil efforts, and

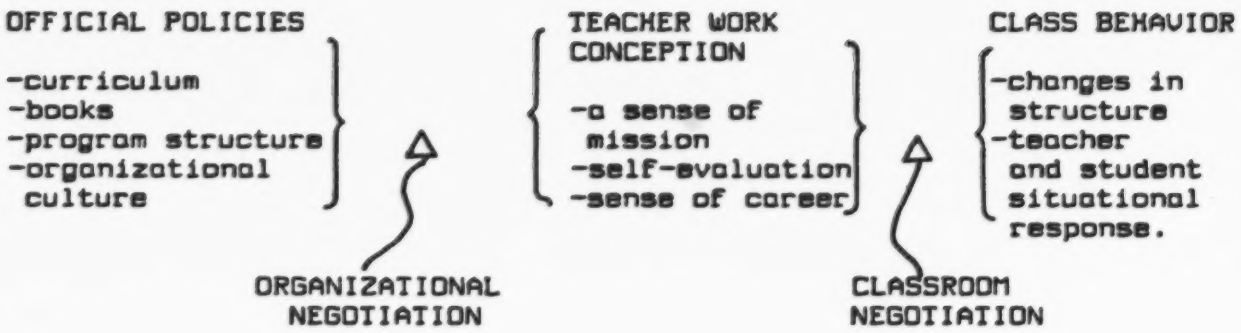
pupils often to minimize them" (Woods, 1978, p. 309). And it has been seen as an interaction with school district policy (Schwille, et al., 1983). The latter research strikes a chord very similar to our own: teachers make policy (p. 376).

When applied to the nine teachers, the negotiated order perspective provides a framework to show how these teachers work out a definition of their jobs. During the field work, we were impressed that each teacher had a very firm occupational self-concept, and could persuasively connect their classroom behaviors to that self-concept. In the interviews which followed the observations the teachers were able to clearly discuss what they were trying to do, and they offered reasons for nearly every activity they undertook. Their work patterns and schedules were clearly intentional but they were not arrived at simply.

Each teacher engages in elaborate negotiation through which they obtain an integrated sense of their teaching practice. The negotiations take place in two settings. First, teachers negotiate the patterning effect of policy directly by various levels of policy adoption and by the ways in which they make workable compromises between competing or contradictory policies. Second, teachers negotiate with students. This negotiation revolves around the omnipresent tension between the need to maintain order and to engage in instruction. To this end, teachers engaged in both structural and situational

Figure 1

Policy Setting and Teacher Work Determination



responsiveness, changing lesson structures according to the characteristics they anticipate among their students and their actual performance according to how the lesson was taking place. These sets of negotiations interact with one another with the effect that while educational policy is structured by legislatures, publishers, and school executives, its particulars are determined by students and teachers. As Figure 1 indicates, teachers are able to synthesize both policy negotiations into an occupational world view that for them defines good teaching and provides feedback on how well they are doing. As the subsequent

sections of the paper illustrate, the two negotiation settings interact with the result that teacher and student behavior and educational policy influence each other.

Negotiation Between Policy and Practice

Policy serves as the context in which teachers structure their lessons and untimately define their work lives. While the effects of policy are highly variable, subject to redefinition and renegotiation, they are not at all trivial. In this sample, the patterning effects of policy can be seen in five different areas: (1) lesson content, (2) text use, (3) program structure, (4) resource rationing, and (5) internalization of organization's mission. Within each area, teachers also engage in policy negotiation: either explicitly with school administrators or tacitly in the particular way they responded to policy dictates.

Lesson content. Clearly, the official curriculum has a highly patterning effect on what teachers teach, and generally teachers complied when there was a hard-and-fast expectation about content. Joanne Baker in Park City was asked why each of the three reading groups appeared to be studying alphabetization even though the groups were formed according to differential

ability. She replied,

> it is not my choice. That's a skill we are supposed to teach in the second grade according to state guidelines, and it's also in the second grade books. Even though I may have children that aren't reading in the second grade level, I try to expose them to the skills...

And in Upland, Susan Ling was specifically told by her principal that she would have to allocate more minutes to science: this a direct result of the state curriculum reform mandates.

However, the content of the response becomes an item of negotiation. In Joanne Baker's case, the essential negotiation is between the child and the lesson: "The kids may not be on the reading level, so I may not expect mastery, but at least they will have exposure. That is my philosophy..." The teacher's bargain is to cover the material, but to allow a wide range of acceptable outcomes. In Ling's case, the negotiation has to do with what is taught in the name of science. There is a 2nd and 3rd grade science text book, and the class has made some use of it, but most of the science work has been experimental: observation, measuring, and recording of data. Small studies in the scientific method.

Required books. Usually, the patterning effect of texts was quite pronounced. All teachers deviated from or supplemented

their basal texts, but all teachers used them, at least for math and reading. The choice of texts was frequently explicitly negotiated. George Gates conducted a virtual campaign on behalf of the Open Court math series, which was eventually adopted by his district. In contrast, teachers in one Upland school lost a text selection battle to a reading series favored by teachers in another school, and they feel trapped with a reader they find difficult to use. Because the choice of texts is a long-term, district-wide decision, the current text (which on cursory inspection seemed to substitute a large number of not very interesting stories for literature) represented something to be coped with rather than something that facilitated learning.

Program structure. Teacher activity is further structured by the programs of the school itself. Although there is variation among the teachers, the pacing for all the classrooms is fast. There are no 50 minute lectures or even 20 minute sermons. The mean time for an interval of instruction is about 7 minutes. Within, and between, those instructional intervals there is a great deal of physical movement and numerous interruptions. There is a physical flow of students in and out of the classroom, and an intellectual flow as they engage and disengage from the lesson. One morning in Sue Diamond's room of 28 students, eight students left and returned to participate in band, four left for special education classes, one left for an English as a second language class, and one left for a class for

the gifted and talented. In addition, six students left early to be lunchroom monitors, a duty rotated among the upper grade rooms.

Teachers also negotiated the complexity of their interaction with one another and with their site administrators. While none of the classes we observed came close to the egg-crate, self-contained classroom stereotype, the extent of integration varied significantly. In one school we observed two fifth and sixth grade combination rooms, each with two teachers, about 60 children and a retractable curtain wall dividing the space. Although the physical spaces were nearly identical, the interaction between the two sets of teachers was quite different. In one class the teaming relationship was largely a division of labor: moving students back and forth to different reading and math groups. In the other, there was a much more complex integration of labor with each teacher at times involved in leading the entire class.

Managing complexity is not easy, and the teachers involved in teaming situations appeared to be engaged in a constant means-ends analysis about whether the results of collaboration were worth the effort. In one of the Utah schools, teachers were simplifying an elaborate multi-grade classroom arrangement. In one teacher's words, "We didn't like it very much. We felt that it was kind of distruptive and it took half the year to get to

know all the kids, and that slowed down progress."

Resource rationalization. Ultimately the contradiction between the global sweep of policy and the availability of resources is rationalized by how teachers spend their time and to which problems they give attention. Individualization of student treatments, for instance, long an aspect of "good practice" in American education was rationalized by classroom space, the availability of aides and auxillary resources, and the number of students in the class.

Teachers consciously managed the physical space in their classrooms so that they could undertake the kind of instruction they wanted. They managed to fashion places for small group instruction. In one new Park City school building, the teaching space included a small sunken amphitheater, called a kiva, which would seat 8 to 10 children. But the other teachers rearranged furniture and imported resources (such as second-hand couches and painted orange crates) to form areas for the same function. In Campbell's room, whole-class instruction was undertaken using a flipchart and easel with the students sitting on a rug that covered part of the classroom. Other rooms had special spaces set apart for reading, listening or other activities.

Each of the teachers we observed had the help of an aide for part of the school day, and in each case the aid directly assisted students as opposed to grading papers or performing

clerical functions. Clearly, the aides extend the ability of class to be individualized by undertaking small group instruction or tutoring. In Ling's class, for instance, each reading group is scheduled with both the teacher and the aide, who listens to the children read and extends their ability to practice with an adult. Teachers, and also program structure, also help to multiply the extent to which adult help is available. The limits on aide time also represent a resource constraint, one which teachers attempt to overcome by substituting other resources. Students are used extensively as tutors, a subject dealt within more detail later, and teachers make active efforts to enlist parents. Two of the California teachers have regular routines that both provide notice to parents of how the child is doing and requesting their help. In one class, any unfinished work is sent home with a "yellow slip" requesting that the parent help the child finish the assignement. In another, each child keeps a spiral notebook of assignments into which the teacher enters notes to home and the parents write back to the teachers. One Park City school requires parents to participate in order to have their children enrolled in a special program for advanced students. Each of these devices is a way around the resource constraint that presents itself when classroom resources are not available to solve problems.

More mundane resource constraints were also clearly visible. One Upland teacher repeatedly reminded her students not

to mark in the reading workbooks. Although these books were published as expendible resources -- tear-out pages with blanks for answers -- the district could not afford new books each year, and students were required to answer on separate sheets of paper. For some teachers in the district, this situation was creating a double bind because they were also short on blank paper.

There were also conspicuous differences in the way teachers behaved when the number of students in their classroom varied. In three cases we observed the number of students in the room drop dramatically as students left the room for other activities. One classroom was filled to overflowing with 42 students for mathematics instruction. There was very little physical movement in the room and virtually all the teaching was lecture style. More than half the students then departed to another classroom, and minutes later students worked together in small grouups. The amount of physical movement increased, and students began to ask questions of each other and of the teacher.

School culture. Less tangible, but no less real than explicit policy dictates, was the effect of school organizations in determining the culture or the mission of the school. The imprint of district educational policy was particularly evident in the Upland schools, where the district has for years supported

a professional development center (which has become so successful that other school districts contract for its services). Teachers in that district have internalized much of the development center's approach and direction. For instance, in that district their are five strands to reading: word recognition, details, the main idea, inference, and research tools. They are evident both in the teaching and in teachers' descriptions.

Everywhere, part of the teacher's work conception involved an integration of district policy, as one Park City teacher illustrates:

> This district... is much more liberal, and I feel more freedom to teach.... You don't have to fill out massive reports proving you taught this concept on this day. I feel like I'm more able to roll with the flow, to feel the pulse of what the kids need... Before I was jamming information down kids throats in order to satisfy the board of education...

And in Upland, when Susan Ling was asked whether it made any difference that Bill Honig was state school superintendent she replied, "yes, the expectations are greater."

These five aspects of policy, then, enter the arena of teaching practice and are further defined by what teachers and students negotiate between them.

The Negotiation Between Order and Instruction

The description of these teachers is well captured by the words brevity, variety, and fragmentation, the same words that Mintzberg [1973, p. 31] uses to describe managerial work. Not all of this busyness is appreciated by teachers, but it is part of the context in which teachers undertake their most constant negotiation: the bargain for order. All the teachers had a personal technique for keeping physical order: lowering the noise level and returning pupils to their seats. Susan Ling in Upland flicked the light switch, and silence fell along with the illumination. John Young in Park City hoisted a red flag, and the children understood to respect it. But the negotiation of which we speak goes beyond the stimulus of a technique and the response of silence. It involves the teacher bargaining to change student behavior to create a setting in which organized learning can take place. As noted earlier, there are two different types of negotiations, one that takes place as the teacher plans or structures the day and another that take place as the teacher responds to events during a lesson.

The structural bargain. Each teacher tailored the lesson or the lesson setting to his or her expectation of the class. In Campbell's second-grade classroom, the desks were compressed at

one side of the room facing the chalkboard. The deliberately constrained space was intended as a means of directing student attention to individual work. This is not the classroom layout Campbell prefers. She adopted it only after observing her students and concluding that she had a class that was "very bright, physically active, but not particularly emotionally mature." Other teachers described similar situations.

The structural bargaining is arrived at both tacitly and explitiely. The tacit bargain with the students is made as the teacher reacts to their behavioral characteristics by putting into place structures and rules. The explicit bargain takes place as students and teachers interact to define those rules and structures. Consider the student's desk as a specific setting attached to which are a set of behavioral rules (Wicker, 1983). Sitting at one's desk in Campbell's class carries with it the implication that there is to be no talking and the student should be working individually. This is a very different meaning than that which attaches to sitting-at-one's-desk in Deborah Diamond's 5th and 6th grade classroom in the same school system. In that classroom, desks are arranged in clusters, and during part of the day students are encouraged to work together and to help one another on assignments.

Changes in the rules are bargained with both teachers and students modifying their behavior in reaction to the others. The

bargain centers around the relationship between behavior to learning. Teachers can often compel behavior, but students can also doggedly refuse to engage in learning, and the passive resistance motif was clearly in evidence in these classrooms. Thus, the teacher responds to an acceptable level of decorousness by altering the classroom structures to increase the extent of engagement in learning. In these classrooms, for instance, we noted that teachers had changed the desk arrangement during the school year, they had changed the amount of time students spent at activity centers where they were free to conduct their own affairs, and they all monitored noise and behavior levels.

A second aspect of the order-instruction bargain is played out in the teacher's use of instructional technologies. Generally speaking, the more complex the technology, the more facile the teacher needs to be to control the class. Take the matter of grouping, for instance. All teachers grouped students by ability for math and reading. The number of groups, however, varied according to the teacher's perceived ability to simultaneously control and instruct. The most complex setting was found in the Franklin and Jones team-taught fifth-sixth grade classroom where there were seven different levels for math. Even in this complex a setting, where the students had mastered the routine movement in and out of groups, teachers still had to decide daily how much individualization was possible. At one point in a mathmatics lesson Franklin sent a student who was not

understanding the concept to a small adjoining room to be tutored by another student. She was able to do this because the preconditions of control had been established, and there were resources available (the room in which to meet and the student tutor).

A particularly interesting further illustration of the order-instruction bargain is found in the use of computers, or the lack to which they are used. A microcomputer was physically present in all the California classrooms, however, usage was severly constrained. In most cases, the computer became, in effect, an activity center: something to which students could go for exploration or enrichment once the core lessons of the day had been completed. Part of the computer usage was doubtless a function of teacher skill and interest, but part was also a question of how complex a technology could be undertaken and still allow order and instruction to take place simultaneously. Notes on the interview with Susan Ling reveal the problem:

> Integrating the computer in the classroom is difficult, she said. It's hard to get the kinds circulated through a single computer in order to complete a task, and the more intensive tasks, such as learning LOGO programming or word processing require students to spend a longer learning period at the computer and to have more time for supervised work. This is difficult. Some teaching about computers can

be done without the computer itself. Ling taught LOGO that way, introducing the commands to the students and having them act them out by moving their bodies to simulate how the computer image would change in response to that command. But even with this off-line activity, it was difficult to get the programs debugged or corrected because of this activity between the teacher, the student, and the computer.

Put in negotiated order terms, the presence of a new technology -- even one as facile as computing -- makes demands on the behavior setting. These demands are relatively inflexible. If there is only one computer and 27 students, an ordering routine will have to be used to allow each student access. To be widely useful, the technology has to be usable in the aggregation of students most common in instruction. For instance, we saw no use of films, overhead projections, or television, although all three modes of instruction were available to the classrooms. The demands of those technologies could not be bargained into the demands of large group instruction: ease of use, materials applicable to the class, capability to instruct. Instead, we saw teachers using chalkboards and flipcharts. We did see computers, manipulable tiles and rods, and audio tape used for small group instruction precisely because these met the demands of the setting.

Situational responsiveness The busyness of the classrooms

required teachers to both handle interruptions and to situationally react as situations arose during a lesson. This requirement created a doublemindedness on the part of teachers in which they were able simultaneously to teach and react, switching from one activity to another with little hesitation: the human counterpart of a multi-tasking computer. Thus, in mid-lesson, a parenthetical "Laura, take your seat," or a more subtile glance, nod or gesture served to gain control without losing the message of the lesson. The business of commanding order was a very unobtrusive one. But a much more significant type of situational response had to do with the teacher's altering the lesson in response to student responses. Through interaction, the content of the lesson was being redefined. George Gates in Park City explained it this way:

> If I see a large segment of the class not catching on to a class -- I can tell because of the way they answer -- I start saying, OK, half the class needs to come up in front, sit on the floor, and we work on this together.

In two other lessons [Jones in Upland and Baker in Park City], teachers responded to their perception that students were not understanding multiplication by illustrating the matrix that represented a problem: "Three rows of seven beans, or seven rows of three. Here, lay them out; count them."

In these interactions, something is traded for something

else. In one classroom an overweight and unattractive sixth grader appeared uninvolved in the lesson. After her math group finished with small group instruction and was sent to work on problems while the teacher met with another group, she sat playing mental movies while other students in the cluster busied themselves with the assignment. Finally, after 10 minutes, she reached down under her desk, found a large organizer-type notebook, and withdrew the still unstarted assignment. When she did so, she was immediately praised by the teacher. Later the teacher explained:

> That student has serious problems at home. She's been missing school, running away. Disorganization is her way of excusing herself from performing. I'm impressed that she's made it to school everyday this week, and very impressed that she bought that notebook, and that she didn't lose the assignment. For the other kids, this was a lesson in multiplication; for Jane it was a lesson in self-respect.

This teacher, like the others, integrated responsiveness and adaptability into the central idea of what good teaching amounts to. Failing to be responsive would be interpreted as failing. Thus, in those situations where the teachers could not respond, responsibility in that setting had to change in order to limit the competing demands on the teacher's time and attention. The deflection of interruptions and the development of mechanisms

to limit them were ways in which these teachers negotiated with a volatile and crowded environment. The bathroom key hung on a hook near the door and the remark, "You need to read the instructions," were each ways of deflecting pressures on teacher attention, allowing them to respond on their terms rather than responding to each environmental stimulus.

The Concept of Occupation

The negotiation processes we observed serve two important instrumental purposes in the schools. First, teachers determine policy. As others have noted before us, a close examination of teaching work, calls conventional theories of bureaucracy into question. There is no discernable line between policy and practice, between what is uniquely managerial and what is uniquely the task of operatives. To reuse a methapor: responsibility, power, and authority are mixed much more like a marble cake than a layer cake. A finding such as this suggests real limits on the ability of external authority to reliably control the minutuia of education, and real frustration for those who attempt it.

There is, however, a second instrumental purpose to these teacher negotiations: one which has not been as well recognized. The nine teachers we studied each negotiated firm, but quite

different conceptions of their occupational lives. They developed firm notions of what good teaching was and of their own technology for doing good teaching. They construct a wholism that incorporates technique, content, and style for the benefit of an educational mission that was uniquely theirs. For Jan Campbell second grade class in Upland, California, the mission was engaged content. This class had a pacing reminicent of Sesame Street, a succession of quick, sharply defined, and very clear segments. And there was also an expectation that students were to be involved with what they were doing, not merely going through the motions. For John Young in Park City, the mission was to engage students in a Socratic dialogue. The give-and-take of question and answer were designed to lead these third-graders to more complex thinking and to verbalization of their reasoning. In John Young's words: "I don't learn from someone that just stands there and lectures... I learn more when I get involved and have to think..., so all my teaching is very question oriented." Each teacher had a firm sense of occupation, a working theory of practice. But the conception of good practice was quite different among the teachers: even those who taught in the same school or the same grade.

We were struck by the power of these working theories of practice because they allowed the teachers to integrate and make sense out of environments that were not inherently tidy. When structural elements of a teacher's setting change, new elements

have to be integrated into a theory of practice, not simply integrated into the teaching day. For instance, two of the nine experienced teachers were teaching a new grade level. Both expressed some anxiety over not fully having integrated the special characteristics of that grade into their practice. Both made more conspicuous use of scripts: the established lesson plans in teacher's handbooks than did teachers in other classrooms. The established lessons made it possible for the teachers to present material and provided the teachers with questions and exercises, but the lessons and the nevances were not yet the teacher's own.

The importance of the theory of practice as an integrating device, and their apparent individuality, raise important problems in teaching policy. First, it is important to encourage teachers to consciously develop their theories of practice, their individual missions. Generally, we have not turned school policies such as teacher evaluation toward the development of individual theories of practice. In those relatively rare cases where evaluation is not a trivial exercise, it usually proceeds according to a deficit-reduction model in which the evaluator points out a problem and the teacher pledges to fix it. The important normative and behavioral differences between work conceptions -- the differences between craft, art, and profession for instance -- are seldom mentioned. Nor are evaluation procedures envoked that encourage teachers to use the process to

further their sense of occupation.

This firm sense of occupation may also have something to do with persistence in a teaching career. Although our study was not centered about the problem of teacher retention, we found in the course of interviews that four of these nine teachers were considering leaving the classroom. Two were working on administrative credentials, another had reached the top of the salary schedule and was "disgruntled", and the fourth was dealing with an increasing feeling of "having done everything that could be done." Each of the four had developed a closed-ended sense of occupation that, after a time, provided no new avenues for exploration.

The second teaching policy question arises in the context of the individuality of conceptions of practice. A profession, or a professionally controlled organization cannot exist without a shared sense of practice or at least some common shared belief that forms the basis of an organizational and occupational culture. We obtained little evidence that such a common or shared conception of practice was well developed. Certainly, it was not as well developed as the individual sense of practice we found among the teachers. It is not as if the school districts have not tried. As noted earlier, Upland has expended substantial efforts on its Professional Development Center, and there were clear reflections of the Center's pedagogical

teachings, but even this does not come close to the shared sense of an organized profession. As an institution, American public education has not yet wrestled with the extent that a shared sense of occupation is worth the investment. We know that organizations benefit from strong cultures and that professions require shared standards and values in order to enforce their identity. What we have not yet decided is whether the effort at acquiring a shared professional ethos is worth the cost.

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